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Migration systems, pioneers and the role of agency

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- analyse migration as part of broader global change
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Abstract

The notion of a migration system is often invoked but it is rarely clearly defined or conceptualized. De Haas has recently provided a powerful critique of the current literature highlighting some important flaws that recur through it. In particular, migration systems tend to be identified as fully formed entities, and there is no theorization as to how they come into being. Moreover, there is no explanation of how they change in time, in particular how they come to decline. The inner workings – the mechanics – which drive such changes are not examined. Such critiques of migration systems relate to wider critiques of the concept of systems in the broader social science literature, where they are often presented as black boxes in which human agency is largely excluded. The challenge is how to theorize the mechanics by which the actions of people at one time contribute to the emergence of systemic linkages at a later time. This paper focuses on the genesis of migration systems and the notion of pioneer migration. It draws attention both to the role of particular individuals, the pioneers, and also the more general activity of pioneering which is undertaken by many migrants. By disentangling different aspects of agency, it is possible to develop hypotheses about how the emergence of migrations systems is related to the nature of the agency exercised by different pioneers or pioneering activities in different contexts.

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Keywords: migration systems, agency, emergence, pioneer migrants, migrant networks, social capital

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1 Introduction

This paper starts from the observation that the literature on migration systems says very little about the origins of migration systems. Why is it that with some sets of movements of people between locations, a systemic quality seems to emerge, with migration taking on a patterned form that is sustained and reproduced over time? In contrast, other sets of movements appear to maintain a more random quality. The literature on migration systems does refer to the crucial role of *pioneer* migrants in starting new migration flows and establishing new patterns, but the concept of pioneer remains underdeveloped: the pioneers are generally identified simply as those who migrate first. However, not all those who tread a new migration path start up a new system. The question remains how we can distinguish between those who blaze a trail for others to follow in growing numbers, and those whose movement has no wider repercussions. What is the relationship between the actions of these first migrants and the establishment of migration systems? This paper starts to addresses this question by developing the concept of the pioneer and reflecting on the agency of those engaged in pioneering migration systems.

The paper begins with a review of the theoretical literature that has adopted the systemic lens through which to view migration processes, highlighting its foundations in general systems theory of the 1950s and 1960s. This review demonstrates important shortcomings regarding our understanding of migration system dynamics and even regarding the somewhat intuitive definitions of a 'migration system'. The notion of migrant 'pioneers' pervades this literature, as these are seen as the key actors in the genesis of migration systems. However, it is not clear how we might differentiate the pioneers, who may set in train a whole migration system, from those random individuals who happen to migrate between two locations. Drawing on the literature and preliminary empirical work undertaken within THEMIS, the paper argues that for empirical enquiry, it is essential to disaggregate the concept of migration pioneers to consider movements between particular locations at particular times, rather than simply referring to national groups. Moreover, the paper suggests that by refining our understanding of different forms of agency exercised by potential pioneer migrants, we can improve our understanding of why some movements result in the establishment of migration systems, while others do not.

2 Systems in migration theory

Implicitly or explicitly, most authors adopting a migration systems approach draw heavily on the rather broad definition of a migration system offered by Mabogunje (1970):

> A system may be defined as a complex of interacting elements, together with their attributes and relationships. One of the major tasks in conceptualizing a phenomenon as a system, therefore, is to identify the basic interacting elements, their attributes, and their relationships. Once this is done, it soon becomes obvious that the system operates not in a void but in a special environment. … [A] system with its environment constitutes the universe of phenomena which is of interest in a given context. (Mabogunje 1970: 4)

Borrowing from general systems theory (discussed further below), Mabogunje stressed the importance of the role of feedback mechanisms in shaping migration systems. For example, information about the migrants' reception and progress at the destination is transmitted

back to the place of origin (Mabogunje 1970). Favourable information then encourages further migration and leads to situations of:

> almost organized migratory flows from particular villages to particular cities. In other words, the existence of information in the system encourages greater deviation from the "most probable or random state" ... [The] state of a system at any given time is not determined so much by its initial conditions as by the nature of the process, or the system parameters ... since open systems are basically independent of their initial conditions. (Mabogunje 1970:13–4)

Migration systems link people, families, and communities over space in what today might be called transnational or translocal communities. This results in a geographical structuring and clustering of migration flows, which is far from a 'random state':

> formal and informal subsystems operate to perpetuate and reinforce the systematic nature of international flows by encouraging migration along certain pathways, and discouraging it along others. The end result is a set of relatively stable exchanges … yielding an identifiable geographical structure that persists across space and time. (Mabogunje 1970: 12).

By advancing the systems approach, Mabogunje is concerned with recognizing migration as a process with feedback mechanisms that change the future patterns of migration. He applies the systems approach to rural–urban migration within the African continent as a way of explaining why and how a rural migrant becomes a permanent urban dweller (Mabogunje 1970: 5).

Mabogunje was not the first to use of the notion of system in relation to migration. For example, there are references to the labour migration system of West and Southern Africa (Arrighi and Saul 1968; Gutkind 1962), but here the term is used as a system of organizing society, often imposed by external forces, such as capitalism. This use remains common – for example in Portes and Böröcz's reference to the German *gastarbeiter* or guest-worker system (Portes and Böröcz 1989).

However, this should not be conflated with Mabogunje's distinctive notion of a migration system as 'a set of places linked by flows and counter-flows of people, goods, services, and information, which tend to facilitate further exchange, including migration, between the places' (de Haas 2010a). This has been picked up most comprehensively by Kritz et al. (1992) who extended it to international migration. International migration systems then consist of countries – or rather places within different countries – that exchange relatively large numbers of migrants, and are also characterized by feedback mechanisms that connect the movement of people between particular countries, areas, and even cities to the concomitant flows of goods, capital (remittances), ideas, and information (Fawcett 1989; Gurak and Caces 1992). The end result is 'a set of relatively stable exchanges of people between certain nations ... yielding an identifiable geographic structure that persists across space and time' (Massey et al. 1998:61). The implicit assumption is that migration systems are characterized by a significant degree of clustering of migration flows.

Although the term 'migration system' has been widely used since, it is striking that very few attempts have been made to further define and theorize the concept and unravel the underlying dynamics that lead to migration system formation. Definitions tend to be vague, loose or absent, while common analyses of migration systems also tend to confound

levels of analysis. While Mabogunje's definition focused on the micro and meso level, Kritz et al. (1992) have tended to focus on the macro level, in which migration systems are perceived as connecting countries rather than regions or places.

As argued by de Haas (2010a), existing studies of migration systems tend to be dogged by three fundamental weaknesses, which highlight gaps in the systems approach to the analysis of migration. First, while systems theory may answer questions about how migration is perpetuated, it assumes that the system is already in place; it cannot explain how and why a system comes into being in the first place. In general, the literature only considers the upward trajectory for the evolution of migration systems. Existing migration systems theory is unable to explain why initial migration moves may not lead to network migration and migration system formation. In fact, most studies of migration systems consist of post-factum identifications of current or past migration systems. In other words, they have been sampling on the dependent variable – in producing their conceptualization of migration systems they relied on 'successful' examples of migration system formation and large flows of people between places and countries (de Haas 2010a). This implies that they have paid much less attention to the question why, in fact, the majority of initial migrations by pioneers and others *do not lead* to the formation of a migration system with a systematic and self-reinforcing growth in migration.

Second, the migration literature tends to concentrate on migrant networks and other direct or 'endogenous' feedback mechanisms at the expense of broader indirect feedback dynamics (de Haas 2010a). Migration systems are associated primarily with the idea that once a critical number of migrants have settled at the destination, migration becomes self-perpetuating because it creates the social and economic structures – in particular the networks – to sustain the process (Castles and Miller 2009; Massey 1990; Massey et al. 1998). While this narrative covers a very important part of the story, it pays little attention to the 'contextual' impact of migration on the broader sending and receiving contexts that change the initial conditions under which migration takes place (de Haas 2010a). For instance, remittances may not only finance migration of other family members but also increase inequality and relative deprivation in origin areas, potentially changing migration aspirations (Azam and Gubert 2006; Stark 1984). At the same time, the settlement of migrants at certain destinations may, beyond a certain threshold at which they start to form a 'critical mass' (see below), lead to community formation and the establishment of 'ethnic' businesses, which may for instance create ethnically specific labour demand and, hence, facilitate onward migration (de Haas 2010a) Such businesses are an example of 'contextual' feedback mechanisms that may fuel migration far more than do the social networks and family linkages envisaged by much of the migration systems literature.

Third, there is very little understanding of the internal mechanisms that drive the migration system. As noted already, many studies adopt a largely circular logic which assumes that feedback reinforces the system. There is very little attempt to conceptualize which migration-undermining feedback mechanisms may counteract migration-facilitating feedback dynamics, and which may explain the endogenous decline of established migration systems (de Haas 2010a). Although it might be argued that this happens because transnational ties weaken over time, this is not necessarily the case, and different migrant groups show widely diverging patterns and levels at which migration systems are sustained over time.

This recent critique of the way the notion of system is applied to the study of migration echoes discussions in broader social theory that have been continuing for many years. In particular, these three fundamental flaws outlined above can each be related to wider debates on *emergence* (Sawyer 2001; Sawyer 2005; Wan 2011a), *system boundaries* and conceptualizing the links between the system and its environment (Walby 2007), and *causal mechanisms* (Bunge 2004; Gross 2009; Hedström and Swedberg 1998; Sawyer 2003). In the next section, we attempt to establish more firmly the linkages between the understanding of systems in migration theory and the themes of system boundaries, emergence and causal mechanisms. We do this by elaborating on the roots of the systems approach to the study of migration in general systems theory.

3 Systems in social theory

Some of the flaws of the migration systems concept as applied to migration studies may stem from the fact that Mabogunje (like later authors such as Lucassen 1987; Borges 2000) borrowed the concept of a system from general social theory and applied it to migration theory. Hence, the rather strictly functionalist formulation of migration systems theory largely reflects the state-of-the-art of systems theory in the 1950s and 1960s. Unfortunately, since Mabogunje, no systematic attempts have been made to refine migration systems theory drawing on subsequent advances in general social theory. Therefore, migration systems theory still largely reflects (the now rather obsolete) social systems theory of the post-war period, which explains its strong functionalist character as well as its inability to account for the heterogeneity of migration system formation (the existence of different trajectories), change (growth, decline, stagnation) within existing migration systems as well as the role of agency (*vis-à-vis* structure) in explaining such change.

Systems theory of that time was a bold attempt to comprehend and encompass social reality using the structural and functional approaches. The early approaches to systems theory saw and relied on analogies with other sciences in the spirit of integration of all the sciences (both natural and social sciences, cf. Bertalanffy 1950). The understanding and interpretation of 'a system' as a complex of interacting elements (Bertalanffy 1950: 143) was often used in analogy to a biological organism with the stress on wholeness, sum, mechanization and centralization (Bertalanffy 1950: 143). Bertalanffy argued that it was possible to identify isomorphisms in the patterns of behaviour of various phenomena in completely different fields, ranging from biology, mechanics and demography to economics. He laid out the broad principles of general systems theory as a contribution to the development of a new formal 'logico-mathematical discipline' which applies to 'any system of a certain type irrespective of the particular properties of the system or the elements involved' (Bertalanffy 1950: 138).

This organicist approach to social sciences was introduced by Comte and largely continued by Spencer and other early social theorists (Coser 1977). There was a widespread belief that society (social system) can and should conform to laws analogous to those for mechanics and physics; i.e. the society operates as a special case of a universally applicable natural law. As a result, sociology could be thought of as a science only when it was based on the idea of natural law: 'There can be no complete acceptance of sociology as a science, so long as the belief in a social order not conforming to natural law, survives' (Coser 1977: 89–90). In this conceptualization of a system, the main stress was on structure alone, as

ideas were epiphenomenal and agency nonexistent: 'the average opinion in every age and country was a function of the social structure in that age and country' (Coser 1977). The complexity of the social system was thus reduced to structural functionalism, over-stressing the role of structural factors (context) over more agentic (actor oriented) approaches.

This highly structural (and functional) approach to social systems was continued by Parsons (1951), who attempted to develop and perfect a general analytic model suitable for analysing all types of collectivities. Parsons attempted to integrate all the social sciences into an overarching theoretical framework that could be applied to every society and historical epoch, and address every aspect of human social organization and culture. He examined the relationship between the whole of a social system (the society, a group) and its parts (area of activity, members of a group). In *The Social System* Parsons (1951) argued that the crucial feature of societies, as of biological organisms, is homeostasis (maintaining a stable state), and that their parts can be understood only in terms of their function within the whole (Parsons 1951). Parsons and other structural functionalists were influenced by Vilfredo Pareto's view that societies could be analysed as systems with self-equilibrating properties (1935). Four functional imperatives must be solved in order to continue existence – adaptation, goal-attainment, integration, and pattern maintenance.

This was the context in which Mabogunje was writing his seminal paper on migration systems. To a large extent, he transposed the ideas of general systems theory to the case of rural (African) migration rather directly; this is evident in his use of terminology, which includes notions of 'control sub-subsystems', 'adjustment mechanisms', and positive and negative feedback channels. The analogy with the physical sciences, especially thermo¬dynamics, is made even more apparent when he comes to talk of open and closed systems. It is in this form therefore that the systems approach has found its way into migration studies, denoting large stable international migration flows that acquired a measure of stability and structure over space and time, characterized by relatively intense exchanges of goods, capital, and people between certain countries (cf. Fawcett 1989).

Since their heyday in the 1950s, traditional functionalist approaches in social theory have been heavily criticized for their often unrealistic assumptions. Much critique has focused on the reductionist character of functionalist theory that renders it incapable of dealing with the complexity and diversity of social phenomena and their mutual interactions. This is related to a more fundamental critique of the equilibrium assumptions of functionalist social (and migration) theories: their inability to explain growing disequilibria and change (e.g. decline, dissolution), within systems, and the striking absence of agency and power in their explanatory frameworks (de Haas 2010a). This has given rise to neo-Marxist and structuralist theory as well as post-modern approaches in social sciences, with the former emphasizing power inequalities and migrants' lack of agency and the latter stressing the diversity and complexity of human behaviour, and the alleged impossibility of squeezing this diversity into overarching, all-explaining theoretical frameworks.

This critique can also be applied to 'orthodox' migration systems, although we should not blame Mabogunje, but rather later generations of migration theorists who have failed to adapt the concept in tandem with with advances in general social theory. In several ways, migration systems theory, as previously formulated, reduces migrants to 'atoms', who react rather passively and in a predictable way to forces in the system (c.f. Kunz 1973). Many parallels can also be drawn with neoclassical migration theory, which explains migration as a response to wage or other opportunity differentials; individuals are propelled by such

macro-forces and their migration reduces the disequilibria within the system in a process of 'factor price equalization'.

It would not do justice to Mabogunje to accuse him of disregarding social realities. His study was grounded in an extensive analysis of rural–urban migration within Africa. His theory described an ideal-type of clustered migratory flows between particular place of origin and particular places of destination, in which diverse feedback mechanisms sustained and reinforced flows along these 'corridors'.[1] However, it failed to account for the genesis and decline of migration systems and the conditions that explain why many initial flows by pioneers do not result in migration system formation.

While the structural functionalist roots of systems theory in the social sciences has resulted in many theorists rejecting it completely, in recent years it has been rehabilitated and subject to renewed attention (Pickel 2007; Wan 2011b). As Walby notes, even when systems theory was being explicitly rejected, many of its basic ideas were smuggled back in with notions such as 'social relations', 'networks' and other concepts which are concerned with social structures that are not reducible to individuals (Walby 2007: 455). Today, it has been enriched by theoretical advances that have started to address the weaknesses identified above.

The challenge of understanding the genesis of a migration system can be reformulated as the more general concern about how social entities or structures that comprise the actions and interactions of individuals can come to acquire properties that cannot be reduced to the level of these individuals. If these *emergent* properties arise, we cannot explain the social as merely an aggregate of the individual. The debates about emergence, which are flourishing in the social theory literature (Elder-Vass 2010; Sawyer 2005; Wan 2011a), suggest many directions for exploringf how migration systems evolve and how they differ. We have to look for plausible theoretical explanations of why particular configurations of individuals, migration behaviour and broader social, political, economic and historical contexts can give rise to new relatively stable patterns of interactions that facilitate subsequent migration. Unlike Mabogunje, we can now draw on more sophisticated theories relating agency and structure and linking different levels of social entities that can help explore the way a system evolves; obvious examples include the work of Bourdieu (1997) Archer (1995) or Giddens (1979). Bringing agency back into the picture in this way addresses one of the fundamental critiques of earlier systems theory.

Thinking in terms of emergence allows us to add considerable nuance to our understanding of migration systems. Instead of assuming that a migration system exists by virtue of substantial migration flows within a migration corridor between two places, it is important to look for evidence of the system dynamics at play; these operate at the level beyond the individual. For example, the fact that there is substantial migration from the UK to the US (and vice-versa) probably has more to do with job opportunities and matrimonial unions of individuals than with the potentially migrant-facilitating function of networks, remittances, or ethnic businesses; this may call into question the extent to which it is useful to refer to a US–UK migration system. In any case, it is important to assess the extent to which migration system dynamics as described by Mabogunje (1970), Massey (1990), de Haas (2010a) and others are at play, including feedback mechanisms that both reinforce and constrain further migration (see de Haas 2010b).

[1] The term 'corridor' is borrowed from Carling (2010).

Again in contrast to the structural-functional systems of earlier years, the 'reconstructed' social systems call into question their *system boundaries*. They are no longer seen as bounded entities with clear distinctions between the system and its context. They cannot be reified as if they have any real existence, in the sense of having a naturally defined set of elements and boundaries akin to an organism. There is clear evidence that migration processes develop systematic, patterned characteristics, in which migration-facilitating feedback mechanisms do play an important role. It may be useful to note a difference between 'endogenous' and 'contextual' feedback (de Haas 2010a) as a heuristic device to differentiate between the various forms of feedback, which may operate in different ways and at different structural levels. Nonetheless, the analysis of systems today is more concerned with the multiple, multi-layered relationships of different 'feedback mechanisms', which may operate in a non-linear, potentially chaotic way; these mechanisms serve not to regulate the system – maintaining its equilibrium – but rather to change both its composition (continually blurring the system/environment boundary) and its dynamism (Walby 2007). For example, the 'securitization' of migration since 2001 shows how what may once have been seen as a factor external to any migration system between West Africa and Europe is now incorporated within it. As de Haas (2010a) argues, a narrow focus on a particular set of feedback mechanisms – most notably migrant networks and remittances – is inadequate for explaining the changing dynamics of migration systems.

Perhaps the strongest aspect of the resurgence of systems thinking in the social sciences is the concern to understand the inner workings of the system. No longer satisfied with the idea of a system as a self-regulating entity which neatly orders the social world (with a bias towards equilibrium), social theorists are concerned with the inner dynamics of the system: its *mechanisms* (Aus 2007; Bunge 2004; Elder-Vass 2010; Gross 2009; Hedström and Ylikoski 2010; Little 2007; Sawyer 2003). Mechanism-based explanations propose causal pathways by which the phenomenon X may result in outcome Y. Such mechanisms are likely to be abstract and not directly observable; but once hypothesized we can look for evidence of their operation (Bunge 2004; Gerring 2008; Mahoney 2001).

These theoretical advances that have reconstructed systems theory have yet to be applied to migration systems, which have remained largely unreconstructed. In the rest of this paper, we make a first attempt to rethink migration systems by considering just their initiation; the beginning is after all a very good place to start. In the standard formulation of migration systems – in as far as there is a standard – the figure of the pioneer migrant looms large. However, the automatic, systemic link between the pioneers and the subsequent growth of migration is never adequately explained. We need to examine these inner workings and identify the mechanisms by which different systems may emerge as a result of the movement of these pioneers. As we show in the next section, unpacking the operation of the pioneers' agency in the migration process enables us to make significant progress towards elaborating a much richer theory explaining how migration systems start.

4 Pioneers: the role of agency

The available migration literature (Faist 2000; Massey et al. 1993; Massey and Espinosa 1997) suggests that it is migration network theory which has been implicitly drawn upon to explain the emergence of migration systems. Migration network theory focused on the extent to which previous migration experience and the settlement of migrants in particular

places of destination facilitated or even predicted the arrival of new migrants (Delechat 2002; Stark and Wang 2002): social capital embedded within networks of relatives, friends, or even merely co-nationals in the place of destination was known to reduce the costs and risks of migration, and thereby increase the likelihood of setting in motion migration dynamics independent of their initial conditions (Bashi 2007; Curran et al. 2005; Curran and Rivero-Feuntes 2003; Garip 2008; Massey and Espinosa 1997; Palloni et al. 2001). Research into the role of migrant networks has also highlighted the varied forms of migration assistance that can be requested and received, resulting in cumulative causation mechanisms (Bashi 2007; Böcker 1994; Boyd 1989; Garip 2008; Muanamoha et al. 2010).

With network explanations gaining more eloquent critiques (Collyer 2005; Krissman 2005; Paul 2011) for failing to explain why some initial moves of migrants result in rapidly expanding network migration while others tail off and stagnate, the conceptualization of migration system dynamics from the sole perspective of networks as structures facilitating further processes of migration seems simplistic, and takes away the agency of migrants to navigate within those structures. For instance, 'migration assistance' does not automatically happen, as established immigrants do not have unlimited resources and might not inevitably see the arrival of more immigrants as beneficial. In other words, established migrants can also turn out to be 'gatekeepers' as much as 'bridgeheads' (Baueret al. 2002; Böcker 1994; Collyer 2005; Epstein 2008; de Haas 2010a).

In the context of migration systems theory our focus on pioneer migrants and their role in explaining how migration systems come into being attempts to distance the migration system from the twentieth-century macro theories and 'bring back' the balanced focus on agency – to understand better the role of pioneers in the phases of initiation of migration. While the effects of various structures (e.g. political, economic, demographic, socio-cultural, environmental), in explaining why migration starts or continues are well documented, the concept of agency of migrants themselves, or of a particular group of migrants (here pioneers) in setting in motion migration dynamics – while appealing, still nonetheless remains understudied.[2] People are not passive recipients of the opportunity structures presented to them by the origin and destination countries respectively, but – in making their decision to migrate, or assisting (to what extent? how?) others to follow their footsteps – they exercise a certain degree of agency and choice (Schiller et al. 1995). While agency generally refers to micro-level human actors (Morawska 2001; Morawska 2011), it can also refer to collectivities that act (Archer 1996). Dietz and Burns see human agents as including 'individuals as well as organized groups, organizations and nations' (Burns 1986; Dietz and Burns 1992). This also pertains to differentiation in the level to which they facilitate or rather try to prevent migration from community or family members.

While we focus on the agency of pioneer migrants (as the most underdeveloped and under-theorized), we distance ourselves from the voluntaristic connotations, bearing in mind that the agency is exercised within the conditions created by structures. The structures derived from past historical actions in turn create the context for current agency. To be an agent means to be capable of exerting some degree of control over the social relations in

[2] Our point of departure alludes to recent developments in American and European sociological thought around the integration (linkage) of various levels of analysis. In the US the approach represented an attempt to develop a theory that could deal with the relationship between the macro (e.g. social structure) and micro levels of analysis. In Europe this was paralleled with exploring the interplay, the relationship between agency and structure (cf. (Ritzer et al. 2004.)

which one is enmeshed, which, in turn, implies the ability to transform those social relations to some degree (Sewell 1992: 20). Broader structural factors such as warfare, colonialism, immigration policies, labour recruitment, or economic development play a significant role in setting the conditions determining the likelihood of pioneer migration and migration system formation (Castles and Miller 2009; Massey et al. 1994). In other cases it was more the trade contacts, religious missions or military conquests, which created imagined pathways along which pioneer migrants could subsequently travel. While structural factors do obviously determine the necessary conditions for large-scale migration to occur between particular places and regions, whether this actually occurs heavily depends on the migration-facilitating and migration-impeding role of the agency of migrants, and pioneer migrants in particular.

5 Who are the pioneer migrants?

The definition of a 'pioneer' according to the Oxford Dictionary is 'one of the first people to go to a particular area in order to live and work there' (Oxford Dictionary Online[3]). The traditional approach to pioneer migration sees pioneers as the initial 'movers', who left their country and community of origin (or current dwelling), and went to a different country and joined a different community, where none of the members of their community had been before. This definition already attributes a certain degree of agency to pioneers by seeing them as those who 'pave the way', and hence create the opportunity for other members of their community to follow in their footsteps. Portrayed in the literature as 'innovators' (Hagerstrand 1957; Petersen 1958), the pioneers are often from relatively well-off households; they are risk-prone and entrepreneurial community members (MacDonald and MacDonald 1964), as early migration often entails high costs and risks (de Haas 2010a).

How far back can we date the identification of pioneers? The written sources on the migratory movements in Europe testify to centuries of large-scale migrations – including Roman conquests, trade trails, mass movements, seasonal migration or colonization of new lands (Hoerder 2002) (thereby challenging the myth of the 'immobile peasant' (Skeldon 1997)). Even if we limit the time frame to the beginning of the twentieth century, and to the era of the colonial empires, the exercise of tracing the conditions under which 'pioneer migrants' moved to Europe will inevitably require a historical approach. Although the role of those very first pioneers in creating transnational linkages and networks is not to be disputed, their migration histories might have become disentangled from the narratives of the present communities or occupy a place in often 'imagined', sometimes 'invented' memory (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983). Moreover, although the quantitative data, tracing the number of migrants based on country of birth or citizenship, produce approximations of community formation and development, a qualitative inquiry reveals that the picture is far more complex, in which 'national groups' can generally be broken down into several sub-groups, periods of arrival, and modes of and reasons for migrating. This once again reveals the danger of 'methodological nationalism' (Schiller et al. 1995) in migration studies. The growth of a particular national origin community can conceal the fact that this group consists of largely or entirely unrelated sub-groups from very distant regions or ethnic or class groups within countries of origin, which might also have arrived at very different periods. Although the first pioneer migrants from India might have come to Britain four

[3] http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/pioneer?rskey=lniikg&result=2

hundred years ago (Visram 2002), the difference between them and the current Indian migrants does not result only from the different historical era but also from the different migratory conditions triggered by the arrival and settlement of the pioneers and the subsequent movements. This enables us therefore to distinguish various 'waves' of migration, which took place in conditions different from those prevalent when the preceding migratory movements took place.[4]

Limiting the time-frame to the migration movements to Europe in the twentieth century, there is ample evidence which suggests that initial 'labour' migration from specific localities within countries of origin was often followed by family migration (usually also confined to those original, specific localities due to cultural and kinship ties). Then – disconnected from the first two waves – there was student migration, or migration of high-skilled professionals, which, in turn, could not be pin-pointed to any specific locality (Kubal et al. 2011a, 2011b; de Haas et al. 2011; Engberssen et al. 2010; Horst et al. 2010). It followed a much more disparate spatial pattern, and therefore resembles less the ideal-typical clustered flows associated with migration system dynamics (Kubal et al. 2011a, 2011b; de Haas et al. 2011).[5] In a similar way, depending on the particular conditions in the sending and receiving societies, initial refugee movements might have been followed by limited family migration, and then – entirely or largely unrelated to these two – by labour or student migration.[6]

As a result, we therefore often seem to see a diversification of migration: labour, or family migration from a specific locality (following the chain pattern), to migration as part of the livelihood experience of many more groups and from far more diverse localities in the place of origin. This seems to point to the frequent occurrence of a diffusion pattern of migration across space and socio-economic groups, which is not necessarily always diffusion from the relatively wealthy to the relatively deprived, but demonstrates different fissures between migrants from the same country. What are the dominant cleavages? First, migration flows are separated by time so that those who come first may have little or no contact with those who come later – most obviously seen in the case of Ukrainian migrants to the UK from before and after the collapse of the Soviet Union (Kubal et al. 2011a, 2011b; de Haas et al. 2011). Second, migration flows are segmented by class and education; the Brazilian 'pioneers' who arrived in Portugal as working professionals move in different circuits from those arriving as low-skilled labour migrants (Fonseca et al. 2010). Third, different groups of migrants can be segmented by geography. Perhaps this is not surprising in the case of a huge country like Brazil, but there are also notable distinctions between migrants arriving in Europe from the Rif region versus those arriving from larger cities in Morocco such as Casablanca, Tangier or Rabat (Kubal et al. 2011a, 2011b; de Haas et al. 2011).

[4] We would want to distance ourselves from the discourses of 'tidal waves' of migrants 'flooding' Europe. On the contrary, we see a 'wave' of migration as a heuristic and analytical device to challenge the methodologically nationalistic position that immigrants from the same origin country could best be understood as a homogeneous group of foreign-borns (Eckstein 2009). By distinguishing 'waves' along different variables such as time of arrival or aim of migration we contribute to nuancing the picture of bilateral migratory movements.

[5] Empirical evidence stemming from the Scoping Studies among Bangladeshi, Indian (Gujarati, Kerala, Punjabi) and Moroccan communities in London.

[6] Based on the example of Polish and Ukrainian migration to the UK.

On the one hand, this has important consequences for the role that the pioneer migrants might have played in the diversification and greater complexity of migration processes (Vertovec 2006), and the transition from one phase to the other. Were these 'waves' really as unconnected as they appear to be, or can we identify pioneers for each wave? On the other hand, the general trends outlined above suggest that there is a correlation between the relative dependence of migrants on social capital and the likelihood of migrant system formation (de Haas 2010a).

While in the past the close-knit migratory groups might have built their identity around the 'imagined' group of pioneer migrants (as in the case of the 1970s–1980s *Sylheti* community and their relationship with *Lascars* from East Bengal), with the present migrations becoming a much more geographically diversified, culturally transnational and socially heterogeneous phenomena, the background and characteristics of 'pioneers' themselves (or the initial migrants) might also have become more diversified. They come from various communities and localities, and represent different social classes. For example, the role of pioneers in the current, expanding economic migration from Brazil to the UK will be attributed to a much lesser extent to the few high-profile political migrants and exiles from Rio de Janeiro, who left Brazil during its times of authoritarian regime in the 1970s, and more to the largely un-named economic migrants who arrived in London from Brazil in the late 1980s (Kubal et al. 2011a, 2011b; de Haas et al. 2011). In a similar vein, it would be a stretch to consider the Second World War Polish refugees who settled in the UK between 1945 and 1953 as 'pioneers' with regard to the post-2004 EU Enlargement large-scale economic migration. Although the history of Second World War refugees was well-preserved in the national imagination, the actual 'pioneers' of the later wave of migration from Poland could rather be said to be the irregular economic migrants who left Poland in the 1980s and 1990s, developed and sustained links with Poland through visiting and sending remittances, sometimes even through direct recruitment of workers; and created an 'underground' migration industry (Garapich 2006; Jordan and Düvell 2002).

We therefore contend that from the analytical perspective, it might be helpful to distinguish pioneer migrants specific to each wave in the migration history and to each migration (sub)system that can be identified under the 'national' label (see above), due to the complexities, diversification and discontinuities within the migratory movements. The role of pioneers will therefore be conceptualized and contextualized with regard to the specific group, time-frame and locality (of origin, and settlement), and type of migration. As a result, the term 'pioneer', as instrumental for further migration processes, cannot be conceived in absolute historical terms. This theoretical clarification enables greater flexibility (and accuracy) in investigating the role of pioneer migrants in bridging the links between the initiation and continuation of migration.

6 Theorization of pioneers' agency: iterational, projective, practical-evaluative

In order to explain the divergent strategies of the pioneer migrants and their role in encouraging or discouraging subsequent migration, it is necessary to further explore the role of agency in migration system formation and breakdown. Emirbayer and Mische observed that agency – as an analytical category in its own right – could be discussed at three levels: iterational (habitual), projective and practical-evaluative (Emirbayer and

Mische 1998: 963). The iterational element of agency is expressed through the temporally embedded process of social engagement informed by the past; the projective element of agency is oriented toward the future; while the practical-evaluative, through the constant interaction with past habits and future projects, contextualizes them within the contingencies of the moment (for the theoretical discussion cf. Emirbayer and Mische 1998).

In the iterational element of agency, past experiences condition present actions through habit and repetition; they allow the sustaining of identities, meanings, and interactions over time. The iterational element of agency manifests itself in actors' abilities to recall, to select, and to appropriately apply the more or less tacit and taken-for-granted schemas of action that they have developed through past interactions (Emirbayer and Mische 1998: 975).

The projective element of agency stems from the standpoint that human actors do not merely repeat past routines, they also invent new possibilities of thought and action (Emirbayer and Mische 1998: 984). As they respond to the challenges and uncertainties of social life, 'actors are capable of distancing themselves from schemas, habits and traditions that constrain social identities and institutions'. What Mead (1964) calls 'distance experience' enables actors to reconstruct and innovate upon those traditions in accordance with evolving desires and purposes (Emirbayer and Mische 1998: 984).

The third, practical-evaluative element of agency mediates between these two and contextualizes them to present conditions: 'as even relatively unreflective routine dispositions must be adjusted to the exigencies of changing situations, and newly imagined projects must be brought to earth within real-world circumstances' (Emirbayer and Mische 1998: 994). These three elements – although analytically distinguished – could be found in any concrete, empirically observed instance of action (Emirbayer and Mische 1998: 963), yet to varying degrees. Depending on the context, reactivation of past, routine patterns of thought and action might sometimes take precedence over actions oriented towards innovation and change.

With regard to migration pioneers, the specific theoretical distinction between iterational, projective and practical-evaluative agency equips us with a useful tool that allows us to hypothesize under which conditions pioneer migration establishes precedents for further migration to follow (and a migration system), and under which conditions it would not happen. This seems to corroborate the hypothesis put forward by de Haas (2010a) that there is a relation between the relative dependence on social capital to migrate and the emergence of systemic qualities to migratory processes: a likelihood of migration system formation. The question at stake here is the role of pioneer migrants in influencing the origin community, and to what extent others might follow in their footsteps.

The dominance of the iterational agency element among pioneer migrants – an orientation towards preserving identities, interactions and institutions over time – would be conducive towards sustaining strong links and ties with their origin communities. The prevalence of the habitual agency, past patterns of thought and action among pioneer migrants might therefore result in pioneer migrants actively seeking for their family members to follow their path and join them. Those pioneers, who on their journeys long for the familiarity of 'home', social ties and known arrangements, might also be more prone to orient their actions towards encouraging other members of their community to join them, and – as a result – stimulate further migration. The relatively enduring repertoires and

scripts of strategies may emerge out of previous collective experiences and influence subsequent individual and group behaviour, encouraging further migration and the rebuilding of the community in the country of settlement. Their dependence on various forms of social capital, but also their conscious efforts to foster social relations for their own future benefit and therefore interest in the active maintenance of social capital (Pathirage and Collyer 2011) motivates the pioneers to assist the migration of non-family community members and friends. Indirectly therefore, the iterationally oriented agency of pioneer migrants might stimulate further migration even to the point of transforming initial limited chain migration towards a full-blown migration system. This scenario seems plausible *ceteris paribus*.

However, when the iterational element of agency is contextualized within the framework of immediate scope for action, with reference to the currently prevalent, and currently enforced structural conditions – such as, for example, a strict host country's immigration policies, visa quotas, or difficult labour market conditions – the routine dispositions must be adjusted to the exigencies of changing situations. The evaluative element of agency might mediate the habitual experiences with regard to present conditions as not conducive to more migration. This might result in limited chain migration of close family and friends, but not large-scale network migration. Emirbayer and Mische see the role of the practical-evaluative dimension of agency as contextualizing social experience to pragmatic and normative exigencies of lived situations (Emirbayer and Mische 1998). This is not to say that the structural condition of the labour market or immigration policies take over, but that the practical-evaluative agency is used in a mediating fashion, enabling agents – pioneer migrants – (at least potentially) to pursue their projects under unfavourable conditions, in ways that may nonetheless challenge and transform the situational contexts of action themselves.

A good illustration of the above mechanism comes from the post-Second World War Ukrainian diaspora in the UK (Kubal and Dekker 2011). Ukrainians, who left continental Europe and settled in England, became past-oriented preservers of Ukrainian identity. Migration and displacement enabled the Ukrainian émigrés in the UK to reconstruct and innovate upon those traditions in accordance with evolving desires and purposes (Emirbayer and Mische 1998: 984) – 'to organize ourselves in this land' (Kubal and Dekker 2011). The processes of social organization of the Ukrainian community in the UK proceeded at a rapid pace. Initially, Ukrainian migrants were accommodated in camps all over the country and worked on local farms. In the camps, they established educational programmes, choirs, folk dance groups, drama groups and even orchestras. In 1946 the Association of Ukrainians in Great Britain was established; the key principle of the Association was mutual support and assistance as the vast majority of Ukrainian settlers had no family – the community became an extended family for them (Kravets 2011). *Ukrayinska Dumka* was first published in 1945 and is still the only Ukrainian-language newspaper in the UK.

As Ukrainians left the camps and settled in industrial towns and cities all over the country, they began to establish churches (e.g. the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church in Duke Street, London), Ukrainian Saturday schools and community centres (e.g. the Ukrainian Social Club and the Association of Ukrainian Women) so that they could maintain their cultural and religious traditions, and pass these on to their children (Kravets 2011). The main role of the established organizations allowed the sustaining of identities and commonly

developed meanings and interactions that were familiar to their members and widely practised when still 'at home':

> We protected all our cultural achievements, and tried to show it all to the Englishman, we tried to find our own place in the English world, a place for us as Ukrainians [I, female, 91, UK].

Basically their aim was to keep people together, so they don't disappear from the face of the Earth. Or probably in less dramatic terms... But the main idea was 'your own goes to your own for their own' [O, male, 41, UK].

The processes of migration of Ukrainians did not come to a complete halt. As the transnational ties with Ukraine were extremely limited due to the political colouring of Europe, Ukrainian men, who were dominant among the émigrés, invited Ukrainian women from Poland and Yugoslavia to come to the UK with a view to marriage. 'I was lucky to marry a Ukrainian' was a popular confession to make among the diaspora members (Kubal and Dekker 2011). In order to preserve the community and maintain Ukrainian identity through the identification with language, values and culturally sanctioned behaviours such as in-group marriage, migration continued until early the 1970s with around 1,500 Ukrainian women joining the diaspora. The specific configuration of iterative and practical-evaluative elements of agency prevalent among the Ukrainians in the UK, and visible through their processes of adaptation, was therefore not only conducive to sustaining identities, meanings and institutions over time but therefore also positively related to further migration movements (Kubal and Dekker 2011).

What about the projective (innovative) aspects of agency of pioneer migrants and their influence on the subsequent flows? Here also two possible scenarios spring to mind – both conducive to and impeding further migration in various configurations.

Those pioneers with a dominant innovative element to their agency, and strong future orientations, might be more oriented towards 'cutting off' the ties with the origin community, also partially as a way of 'escaping' negative social capital, conservative norms and relationships (de Haas 2010a). Pioneers might conceive of their migration as a response to the challenges and uncertainties of social life, and as a way of distancing themselves from the schemas, habits, and traditions that constrain their social identities (personal development) and prevent change within institutions (scope for action) (Emirbayer and Mische 1998: 984). Migration as 'distance experience' (Mead 1964) enables the pioneers to reconstruct and innovate upon those traditions in accordance with evolving desires and purposes. This again supports the thesis of the differentiated role of social capital, and particularly the relative dependence on family- and community-based social capital to explain why some migratory movements take off while others tail off and stagnate (de Haas 2010a). The more highly skilled and wealthier pioneers are likely to be less dependent on family and kin to migrate, as well as to settle and feel good in the destination, because of their financial and human as well as cultural capital, which allow them to migrate more independently. As they are less dependent on family networks and ethnic business clusters and more likely to be attracted by job opportunities, they are also less likely to cluster at destinations, thereby lowering the chances for migration system formation (de Haas 2010a).

These strategies were particularly observed during the analyses of the pioneer Egyptian migration to the UK (Kubal et al. 2011a, 2011b; de Haas et al. 2011). The highly skilled members of the middle and upper classes who came to the UK in the late 1940s and

1950s to pursue their degrees and continue employment in technical and medical professions treated migration as a solely individual project. The success of their journey did not depend on social capital, nor the ties with family and community members back home. Reflecting back on their beginnings in the country they were also 'not interested' in others following in their footsteps, nor particularly engaged in helping members of their community to come (Kubal et al. 2011a, 2011b; de Haas et al. 2011).

This helps us to conclude that the projective dimension of agency, its direction towards future possibilities (e.g. assimilation and acculturation with the host society, economic self-betterment) might result in actions which do not encourage (or even actively discourage) other members of their community to follow their path, apart from limited chain migration of family and close friends. Strong future orientations might restrain actors' responsiveness to pressures from within their community of origin, and conformity with traditional norms and social institutions.

However, the consequences of the innovative element of agency are once again not unitary. When the practical-evaluative element mediates the innovative agency, it might be also instrumental in encouraging further flows. The innovative orientation towards the future might make pioneer migrants interested in facilitating further migration of their group members, so that the new experiences, change and betterment that stem from migration as a livelihood strategy might be shared by more community members and put in motion more intense processes of social change and transformation. This scenario corresponds with the vast literature on chain migration and the creation of ethnic niches (Eckstein 2009; Massey and Espinosa 1997; Portes and Bach 1985; Portes and Zhou 1993), which demonstrated that innovatively oriented migrant-entrepreneurs seized the void they encountered in the host country's labour market and filled it with decisions that encouraged further migration. Within ethnic business growing (ethnic cuisine, restaurants) they sponsored further, sometimes chain, migration of skilled chefs, waiters, porters, etc. This is one of the interpretations explaining the trajectory of the *Sylheti* (Bangladeshi) community growth in and beyond London's East End (Kubal et al. 2011a, 2011b; de Haas et al. 2011).

While the end results of the predominance of one type of agency over the other might look apparently similar – resulting either in limited chain migration or in migration take-off and expansion – the true motives behind pioneers' agency are available to view only via in-depth qualitative analysis. This reveals that actors engage in different structural environments, and through the interplay of habit, imagination and judgment, both reproduce and transform those structures in interactive response to the problems posed by changing historical situations.

These three dimensions of agency – iterational, projective and practical-evaluative – are of course analytical constructs, and can simultaneously be part of the migration experience of the pioneers in their strategies to encourage others to follow them. Treated separately they are almost like Weberian ideal types, as they never 'exist' alone. It is only together that they become constitutive to human experience. On the other hand, in any given – empirically observed – situation, one or another of these aspects might well predominate.

To give an example where these three elements of agency interplay with each other in various configurations: Europe from the 1960s onwards saw large numbers of Moroccan labour migrants (Cherti 2008, Kubal et al. 2011c). There is ample evidence suggesting that

the pioneer Moroccan labour migrants were innovatively oriented individuals (Kubal et al. 2011a, 2011b, 2011c; de Haas et al. 2011; Cherti 2008) looking for economic betterment for themselves and their families. They had an active interest in facilitating other members of their community to follow. This 'help' took the form of ad-hoc establishments and migrant networks, and indeed – as the trajectory of the development of the Moroccan migration system to Europe suggests – the 1960s and early 1970s saw the expansion of Moroccan labour migration.

The 1970s and 1980s saw, however, the emergence of a different type of Moroccan migration – oriented towards family reunification and family formation. Although the pace of expansion was comparable (or even faster), it is rather the iterational element of agency – orientation towards preserving identities, interactions and institutions (like the culturally and religiously sanctioned institution of in-group marriage) – that might have been at stake here. The cultural codes, past habits embedded within social and community life but contextualized to contingencies of the present by the settled Moroccans, made them look for wives and husbands for their children back in their place of origin. It is therefore the predominance of the iterational element of migrants' agency, which might have influenced the subsequent expansion of Moroccan migration to Europe.

7 Conclusion

The paper served to develop a set of hypotheses regarding the potential role of pioneer migrants' agency in exploring the conditions under which initial moves by pioneer migrants to Europe result in the formation of migration systems and the conditions under which this does not happen.

The role of pioneers' agency is crucial to the outcome of the above processes, as 'actors engaged in emergent events find themselves positioned between the old and the new and are thus forced to develop new ways of integrating past and future perspectives, new ways of responding to changing situations' (Emirbayer and Mische 1998: 1006).

We demonstrated how the intersection between the various elements of pioneer migrants' agency and the relative dependence on social capital (cf. de Haas 2010a) may lead to the emergence of particular systemic qualities of the migration movements. The conditions conducive to the dominance of the habitual or projective aspects of do not occur randomly or ambiguously, but certain types of agency tend to coincide with the prevalence of different forms of social capital (de Haas 2010).

Migrants' agency in interplay with high levels of social capital is more likely to lead to the take-off and sustenance of migration processes either oriented towards past habits or rebuilding the community in the destination; or towards the future: adaptations in the form of ethnic enclaves and migration businesses. The interplay between migrants' agency in conditions of exclusionary, 'negative' social capital also explains why the supposed 'diffusion' of migration within communities can remain largely limited to particular ethnic groups, families or classes which monopolize access to international migration.

Further elaboration of the conditions conducive to dominance of the habitual or projective aspects of agency, and their consequences – at a given time, and with reference to a particular wave of migration – has therefore important theoretical implications and

complements the strand of analyses focusing solely on macro-level, contextual and structural factors for explaining the emergence of migration systems.

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